

JUST FILM

VID-PICKS

By MICHELLE SAAR
It is raining out, you've got your favorite pair of old sweats on, freshly made microwave popcorn in one hand and teddy bear in the other. You're ready to sit down and enjoy a great movie or videotape. Who needs a movie theater when you can rent?

Unfortunately, you know that once in the rental store, you will stand in front of an endless row of movies, scratching your head in confusion for three hours and that you will end up renting "The Breakfast Club" for the millionth time. To eliminate some of the anguish involved in this decision making process, I have some suggestions. I recommend them the next time you're feeling like a couch potato.

"Room With a View"
In the mood for love? This movie is an adaptation of the E.M. Forester novel about a young English woman living in a rigid, proper society of the 19th century. She begins to discover life, passion and love when she meets a man that awakens her from her slumber. This film is wonderfully romantic and extremely witty, with lush scenes of Italy and England and beautiful costumes. For any opera enthusiasts, an added plus are the lovely arias that punctuate many of the scenes.

"Night on Earth"
This entire film takes place within five different taxi cabs at five different areas of the world on the same night: Los Angeles, New York, Rome, Paris and Helsinki. Each city has a different story of the night to tell about the sort of people that drive taxis and take taxis there at a specific time. Often amusing, this film gives the audiences a brief slice of life from the various array of intriguing characters that are portrayed. If you're in the mood for something different, be daring and see if you like this one.

"La Femme Nikita"
Warning: this is a foreign film that contains subtitles. However, contrary to popular belief, this is not hazardous to your health. This French film is not your typical foreign film. It is a sleek, fast-paced, action-packed movie much like most popular American films. The cool twist in this is that the sweating, macho killer is a woman. Therefore, along with all the violence and suspense, the characters are not all one dimensional, predictable caricatures, like most American films. Girls — seeking ideas for a career? Then check out this lady!

"Cinema Paradiso"
So, you like foreign films and you don't mind reading subtitles? You actually want to get away from action, guns and car chase scenes? Then this delightful Italian movie will warm your heart. Set in a remote village in Italy, this movie beautifully depicts the transformation that occurs in peoples' thoughts and actions when a movie house becomes the focus of life and subtly affects everyone. Filled with nostalgia and whimsy, this film left me smiling, yet somehow feeling sad all at once.



Tom Berenger (left) and Billy Zane (right) star in "Sniper." Billed as a film of "action and suspense," it is actually a film of laughter and clichés (unintentionally, of course).

Sniper
dir. by Luis Llosa
Tri-Star Pictures

There are few positive things that can be said about "Sniper," except that it made "Gocha!" look like something out of a Tom Clancy novel. It was that bad.

Tom Berenger, a disgruntled Marine sniper with more than 74 confirmed kills, is sent on a mission in Panama. Having lost his last "spotter," a young SWAT sniper (played by Billy Zane) is sent to aid Berenger in killing a Columbian drug lord and various rebel leaders who are planning to take control of the government in the upcoming elections.

In the privacy of a walnut paneled Washington, D.C. office, Zane is given his orders and some dossiers. If Berenger becomes a "liability to the mission," he is told to "take him out." Not surprisingly, Berenger scraps all the official plans and dispenses with all formalities.

You know what happens next. They fight, they kill, they fight with each other, they kill, Zane learns some things from Berenger and Berenger confronts the horror of his life as a killer.

However, it's hard to develop any real, poignant message with a script that's about a page-and-a-half long. The majority of speech in "Sniper" comes in the form of grunts and groans. We hear something about how Berenger wants to retire to fish, but it's never developed.

Half of the film is shot from the perspective of a gun sight — a cute effect, no doubt, but overused none the less. Other special effects include a bullet's eye perspective of each shot, in which the camera follows the trajectory until it meets its target. Save your money — doubtless this film will be on Showtime before the summer, and on Lifetime in two years.

— J. LAWRENCE KORENMAN

The Crying Game
dir. by Neil Jordan
Miramax Pictures

See this film. But if someone tells you its secrets, shoot him. The entire concept of "The

Crying Game" is unlike any I have ever seen. It is one of those films that only comes around every so often. If "The Bodyguard" is the Richard Marx of films, then "The Crying Game" is the Lou Reed — filled with substance, symbolism and meaning. This movie has one of the most shocking plot twists in cinematic history.

"The Crying Game" is about a British soldier, Jody (Forest Whitaker), who is taken prisoner by the Irish Republican army. Over a period of three days, Jody befriends Fergus (Stephen Rea), one of the IRA guards, and intense exchanges between the two men begin.

Eventually, the demands of the IRA are not met, and now it is "Fergie's" duty to kill Jody. However, Jody is killed in a freak accident as the British army discovers the location of the IRA hideout and destroys the area with gunfire. Fergie escapes and decides to begin his life over again, in London, under an assumed name. Now a construction worker, Fergie seeks out Jody's former lover, Dil (J. Davidson) a beautician. Fergie eventually falls in love with the beautiful Dil, and here is where the story begins.

This movie is an important cinematic achievement. It integrates so many concepts and weaves them into a complex story that never really ends. Close up shots of a bloody mouth can sometimes make the cinematography disturbing, but it never developed.



Forest Whitaker (left) and Stephen Rea (right) star in Neil Jordan's "The Crying Game," which has one of the most intricate plot twists of any film to date.

is always amazing. Both Rea (who is a veteran of Broadway) and Whitaker give performances beyond sizeable magnitude. Rea's portrayal of the kind and naive Fergie deserves an Oscar nomination. Miranda Richardson gives an impressive performance as the idealistic and at times violent Jude.

This is a movie that you will be talking about for a long time. Its complex characters, brilliant screenplay (Neil Jordan) and major plot twists will give you a lot to think about long after you have seen the movie.

If you're going to Harvard Square anytime soon, see this movie!

— GUY RAZ
Scent of a Woman

dir. by Martin Brest
Universal Pictures

When a movie wins a Golden Globe Award, it is usually good. When an actor wins one, his performance is usually above average.

So will someone please tell me why "Scent of a Woman" and its star, Al Pacino, won the distinguished Golden Globe Award from Hollywood's Foreign Press Association, because I am truly baffled. After the first hour-and-a-half of this languid and lethargic movie, I was truly falling asleep.

In fact, when Al Pacino's

character threatened to blow his brains out half-way through, I was breathlessly awaiting the splattering of brains on the hotel room wall. At least, then, there would have been some action, a bit gross, but definitely interesting to watch.

"Scent of a Woman" is a two-and-a-half hour movie about an obnoxious army Colonel who is retired because he blinded himself while juggling grenades.

Because of his blindness, he feels that his life is no longer worth anything; except, of course, for the fact that he can name the fragrance and/or soap a woman within a mile of him uses. So he decides he is going to fly to New York City, stay at the Waldorf-Astoria, eat a great meal, make love to a beautiful woman and then kill himself by shooting a bullet into his brain in his hotel room.

Here's the catch. His blindness makes it necessary to take someone with him. Enter Chris O'Donnell, the troubled and poor Oregon raised boy who needs to make some money so he can fly home for Christmas.

O'Donnell has been snookered, however. He thinks it's going to be an easy \$300, for he is just going to keep the Colonel company for the weekend. Little does he know that the trip that he is going to take with the Colonel will end with the resolution of his problem and that he will give the Colonel insight (no pun intended) to making his life meaningful.

The root of the movie's problems, however, is Paul Goldman's monotonous screenplay. (He, too, won a Globe Award; again, I am perplexed.)

I know I am being a tad bit harsh, but this movie is really bad. And to add to its horridness, whenever Pacino's character wants to emphasize a point, he makes a sound very much like that of a man hacking up lung fluid. This sound has too many vowels to spell out; and besides, I don't think I would do Pacino justice if I attempted to spell out what he coughed up so well on screen.

I really do not know why the Hollywood Foreign Press Association gave three of their precious statues to such a base film. My only explanation is that its voters fell asleep with the rest of the audience, and dreamed of a better film.

— JILL WEINSTEIN

JUST MUSIC



Elvis Costello with
The Brodsky Quartet
The Juliet Letters
1/2

Back in the 11th grade, when I first started my amateur career as a music journalist, I vowed that I would never critique Elvis Costello. To me, criticizing one of the perennial figures in the history of rock and roll would be sheer blasphemy; and besides, we all know that the original "angry young man" could do no wrong.

Well, four years after I made this promise, I find myself at a crossroads. Elvis Costello has recently released a highly ambitious record with the Brodsky String Quartet and I reluctantly accepted the task of writing the review. But after giving it much thought, I decided that I would not so much write a review as a warning.

For all of you who enjoy such Costello classics as "Alison," "Oliver's Army" and "Radio, Radio," or even the more recent tunes such as "Veronica" and "The Other Side of Summer," take note; "The Juliet Letters" features only two violins, viola, violoncello and voice. There are no drums, keyboards, guitars, harmonies or singable melodies.

Planned as a song sequence for string quartet and voice, Costello's latest brainchild reads more like a bizarre Broadway show gone awry than a sophisticated synthesis of smart rock and roll and classical music.

Adding to the record's unorthodox musical approach is an equally unusual lyrical theme. A professor in Venice has been answering letters addressed to the Shakespearean character "Juliet Capulet," and the twenty songs from "The Juliet Letters" are based on this correspondence.

Penned as a team of quartet members, with resident lyricist Costello as editor, the album's lyrical quality pales in comparison to his previous work. Once known for his provocative word phrasing, biting commentary and sharp delivery, "The Juliet Letters" finds the artist stifled by the constricting theme.

But just when I was ready to dismiss the album as a failure

(relative, of course, to other Costello records), Costello rebounds with "I Almost Had a Weakness," a dazzling tango which confirms the songwriter's artistry.

"Swine," described as "a piece of deranged, political graffiti carved on a wooden door" reaffirms Costello as one of the premiere lyricists in the business and features the vocalist in all his bitter glory as he sings, "You're a swine/and I'm saying that's an insult to the pig."

So, it should be apparent that "The Juliet Letters" has its redeeming qualities, and as I come to the conclusion of this 'review,' do not expect me to tell you whether or not I like this record. As a truly devoted Costello fan, I must confess that I am overjoyed with the new album; but then again, if the man released an album of sneezes, I'd probably be satisfied.

On the Costello scale, relative to his other work, I rate "The Juliet Letters" a two-and-a-half stars, ranking just above 1984's "Goodbye Cruel World." In terms of the broader musical spectrum, I give this album a strong three-and-a-half-stars and a final warning: This ain't no rock and roll!

— DOUGLAS NEWMAN



Dr. Dre
The Chronic
1/2

Dr. Dre, formerly of NWA, has released his first solo effort, "The Chronic." The album is more of a production effort than a solo project, for Dre enlists the help of Snoop Doggy Dogg and various unknowns. While there are some high points to the album, it features far too much chatter and some of the songs just don't come off.

As is usual for Dre, the album contains lyrics that may be offensive to women and probably most others. The interesting thing is that he actually features a female rapper, Kurupt, on some tracks. "A Nigga Witta Gun" and "Stranded on Death Row" both feature gangster lyrics and oppressive basslines. This is what Dre does best, although often it feels clichéd.

The best part of the album is definitely "The Roach." It is

basically a remake of "P-Funk (Wants to Get Funked Up)" by Parliament. It sounds surprisingly like the original with some lyrical changes.

An example of how not to rap can be heard on "High Powered." Check out RBX for a laugh. The strange thing is that he does flow on other songs. Although "The Roach" is excellent, it doesn't make up for the flops. Dre can rap, but not as well as MC Ren, his former NWA buddy.

— ROB HUGHES



Yellowjackets
Like a River
1/2

The Yellowjackets are one of the most popular and influential bands in the shaping of modern jazz. From the beginning, the 'jackets have also been known as consummate musicians, and on their latest, "Like a River," they continue their rich tradition.

Unlike their last CD, "Live Wires," a live album that did not capture the band in its top form, "Like a River" puts the Yellowjackets back on track. Their last studio effort, "Greenhouse," brought my favorite jazz musician, Bob Mintzer, into the fold, and Mintzer's work and influence can be heard all throughout the album.

The songs span all kinds of music. The leadoff track, "Man Facing North," which is written by all four Yellowjackets, is a Latin flavored ditty that serves as an appropriate introduction for "Like a River." It shows the listener what to expect on the other nine tracks — strong ensemble work, union lines, solos that are tasty and not pretentious, and a sense of interaction and groove.

"River Waltz" is a toe-tapper in 3 which showcases everyone's ensemble work in fine form and has outstanding solo work from Mintzer, pianist/keyboardist Russell Ferrante and a beautiful fretless bass intro from Jimmy Haslip.

"Sandstone" is the most straight-ahead song on the album, and also the best. It features Ferrante, and union lines from Mintzer and Hagens, as well as anchoring by Haslip and drummer William Kennedy. The songs also has the only drum solo, and awesome trade offs between Hagens and Mintzer.

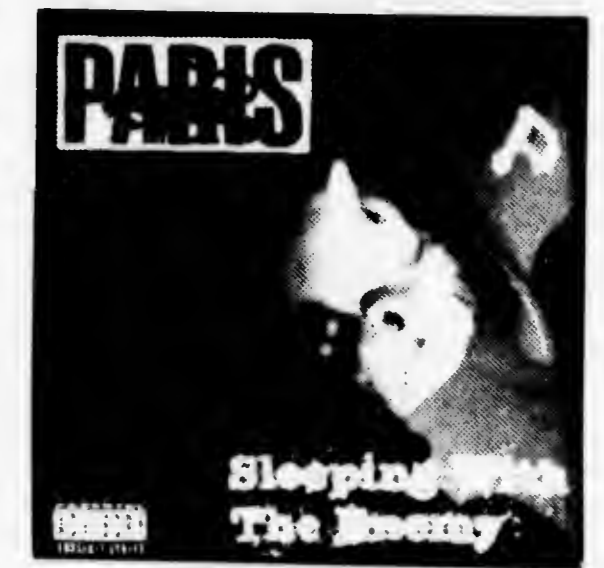
"Solitude" is a nice, mellow way to end "Like a River." Haslip's bold, yet understated solo, helps to fuel this number, along with Mintzer's tender sax lines.

"Dewey (for Miles)," featuring guest artist Tim Hagens on trumpet, is a fitting, funky tribute to Miles Davis, and "Memoirs" is a sensitive ballad written by Mintzer. The other tracks are more of the same — good, strong jazz with no surprises.

"Like a River" is an enjoyable

jazz album for the masses. It combines traditional jazz with modern flare, and the combination, along with the chemistry of the group, keeps the music vital and interesting. The Yellowjackets sting yet again.

— ALLAN HIRT



Paris
Sleeping With the Enemy
1/2

"Sleeping With The Enemy" is the latest album from Paris, a militant George Bush hater with obvious stylistic connections to Ice Cube, Public Enemy and Ice T.

The first track on the album, "The Enemy" begins with the assassination of our then President, George Bush.

His murder, pleasing as it may be to some, is included purely for shock value. The shock, however, quickly loses any value as Paris imagines countless situations where he is face to face with George Bush, waving his gun in the air and shouting one liners such as "Me and you Muthafucka!"

Trying once again to shock and amaze us with his stale lyrics and fabricated scenarios, Paris creates a scene where two cops attack and supposedly rape a woman, on the track "Coffee, Donuts and Death." Paris' obvious attempt to imitate the styles of already established rap artists gives this album a cheap, recycled sound that isn't worth the \$16 it costs. Rehashing other artists' bass lines and adding generic vocals make Paris' new album, "Sleeping With The Enemy," a sad imitation of what rap should be.

— MARK GREGOR



Starclub
Starclub
1/2

England has had a knack for supplying some of the best pop acts to date — the Beatles, Squeeze, Paul Carrack, Rod Stewart, Queen, 10cc, the Kinks, Free, Tears for Fears and the Who. Starclub's self-titled debut album follows in this tradition, but brings the British pop sound into the '90s.

From the first track, "Hard to Get," which is in the Difford and Tillbrook tradition, and "All Falls

Down," Starclub is musically reminiscent of Squeeze.

"Let Your Hair Down" showcases the group's Beatlesque harmonies, and is "Tomorrow Never Knows" meets a funky dance beat. "Bad Machine" is a '90s version of the Beatles' "And Your Bird Can Sing." "Call My Name" is another track that could come straight out of the Beatles' songbook.

The rest of the album is just as strong as the tracks mentioned and showcases these influences, as well as some Motown, Stax-Volt, U2 and others.

The lead singer, Owen Vyse, sounds like a mixture of Paul Rodgers and Paul Carrack, two of the most distinctive pop voices of the past two decades.

The guitar work by Vyse and Steve French are reminders of the Lennon-Harrison school of guitar work, playing harmonies, blistering solos and strong rhythm. Bassist Julian Taylor's bass lines are melodic, not unlike Paul McCartney — simple, yet eloquent.

Producer Chris Hughes, whose previous credits include Tears For Fears and Paul McCartney, brings out the best in the band and, judging by his past experience, knows how to capture that Beatlesque sound and change it into something completely fresh and new.

I, for one, have been complaining about the lack of new music worth getting excited over. Everything now, for the most part, has the Seattle sound, or that "alternative" sound that is no longer alternative. "Starclub" is an impressive debut, and a band to look out for in the future.

— ALLAN HIRT



Sass Jordan
Racine
1/2

There's a new female voice on the music scene, that of Sass Jordan. No, she's not another Mariah Carey; in fact, she's the furthest thing from it — their styles are very different. Her premiere album contains 11 songs packaged on one disc which she calls "Racine."

What distinguishes Jordan from every other female vocalist who has tried to make it in this unsympathetic industry is her voice. She has a deep, throaty, rough voice somewhere in the vein of Tina Turner, which, at times, seems so tough that it could cut bread. It works well for most of the songs, with a few small exceptions.

The style of her music is almost all blues based with the standard rock 'n' roll features such as acoustic and electric guitars, piano, drums and the occasional

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A Classic
Excellent
Good
Fair
Save Your Cash